

Since November 2016 unprecedented numbers of protests have taken place in our country. With pipelines contaminate our soil and water, unconventional drilling threatening our air, and injection wells leaking dangerous waste into the ground, these protests have grown louder. In the past two years, people have lifted their voices against the damage done by extreme methods of fossil fuel extraction and the dangerous byproducts of continued oil and gas expansion. People in our country have a right to be heard.

Our elected officials should be engaging with their constituents and listening to the concerns these protesters are bringing to them. Elected officials are responsible for representing the will of the community. The First Amendment guarantees the right of the people to assemble, the right to speak freely, and the right to petition the government. It is through these First Amendment rights that people bring their concerns to the attention of the government.

Instead of representing the interests and concerns of Ohioans, Senator Hoagland has proposed the criminalization of peaceful protests when a protest might lower the profits of privately owned companies. Hoagland's Senate Bill 250 seeks to impose fines up to \$10,000 and 9 months to 3 years in prison for being on a drilling site or pipeline even when no harm is done to the property. Penalties would apply to anyone flying a drone over a drilling site or pipeline facility, and to those who participate in the planning of a protest. This bill specifically protects private oil and gas companies who come to Ohio, drill through our shale, tear up our land for pipelines, pour toxins into our air and water, then take their oil and gas out of Ohio to be sold elsewhere.

Senate Bill 250 is an unconstitutional suppression of our right to protest. Ohioans depend on unpolluted watersheds, thriving forests, clean air, and healthy soil. We have every right to protest when private companies threaten these natural resources of air, soil, and water on which we have built our communities.

Senate Bill 250 does not represent the interests of Ohioans and will degrade the health of our families, our cities, and our state. Its goal is to maintain profits for national and international corporations. This bill should never become law in Ohio.

Linda New  
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